

A Perfect Fit

(Stories That Lift – July 17, 2008)

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Shyanna's eyes slowly drooped shut over the paperwork that lay on the desk in front of her. Toffee-colored curls flopped across her face as her head bobbed down, then snapped back up again, dark brown eyes popping wide open. *Man! I'm not gonna make it.* She breathed in deeply and looked over at the wall clock, noting the 3:56 a.m. time. She rose, slipping her feet back into ill-fitting navy blue pumps. Taking several more deep breaths, and swinging her arms in wide circles, she began pacing across the lobby, willing herself to stay awake for the rest of her shift.

She'd applied for the position as night auditor of the Fairview Hotel to help pay her college expenses. With only a couple of months left to finish her master's degree in social work, the weekend position had fit in perfectly with her academic schedule. She was able to attend classes and study during the week, then work all weekend. But the mid-term exams from the past week had worn her out. Smoothing her ruffled navy blue uniform jacket and khaki skirt, she did some stretches before deciding that a few laps around the lobby carpet with the vacuum cleaner might help wake her up.

Digging into the utility closet, she tugged out the ancient Hoover and plugged it in. The old machine hummed to life and she started working her way methodically around the room, letting her thoughts drift. She was dreading going to dinner at her mother's apartment the next evening. The university was only an hour away from where she'd grown up, and she'd been having Sunday dinners with her mother ever since her father had passed away a year and a half ago.

Her mother, a tiny, feisty Italian, was full of energy and opinions—which was the direct cause of their latest tiff. Both Shyanna and her mother were strong willed and tended to get into “discussions” that could turn rather heated. Her father had always joked they were too much alike. He'd been the mediator—smoothing things over whenever they got out of hand.

“Now Bella,” he'd say in the sugar-sweet drawl leftover from his Virginia childhood. “I think Shyanna has made a good point here. Maybe you could try it her way just this once.” Then he'd wink at Shyanna as her mother struggled between appeasing her husband, and stubbornly trying to win the argument with Shyanna.

But now he was gone. And lately, her mother had been nagging every time they got together. It was getting old, and her latest rant was the worst yet.

“You're almost through at that school.” Her mother had said pointedly the last time they'd been together. “You'll never have that many choices located all in one place ever again in your life.”

“Mother! You're so tactless! I'm focusing on my M.S.W., not my MRS. degree.”

“All I’m saying is that all the good ones are going to be taken if you don’t get a move on.” Shyanna had rolled her eyes, sighing loudly. She just hoped her mother wasn’t inviting another new “friend” to join them for dinner tomorrow night.

She totally doesn’t get it. Shyanna moved an end table out of the way so she could vacuum under it. *Besides, it’s not like I haven’t tried.* But her record in terms of choosing good men, had been less than stellar. In her junior year of undergraduate study, she’d dated Tommy. He’d smothered her with attention, but seemed to be more interested in how good she’d looked on his arm than with what was going on in her head. A year later, she’d met Jake, who’d been unable to complete three sentences with her before he was back on the phone with his bookie. Joe had been a great guy, really fun to be with, but she’d found out later that he was also really fun to be with for several other girls. He just wasn’t looking for anything serious.

Shyanna tripped as she accidentally stepped out of her shoes for the second time that night and the hundredth time since she’d gotten them as part of her uniform. *Trying to find the right guy was like trying to find the right pair of shoes,* she mused as she slipped them back on, and struggled to slide one of the heavy chairs back into position. *It’s tough to find that perfect match of great looking and a perfect fit, and no pinching on the sides,* she mentally added, remembering her brief fling with Derrick.

Shyanna was all the way on the other side of the lobby when the switchboard phone rang, the roar of the old Hoover’s motor drowned out the sound and she vacuumed on, blissfully unaware. Fifteen minutes later, she was finished, a light sheen of sweat covering her.

Pulling an old scrunchie from her uniform pocket, she stuffed her curls into a loose ponytail, a few tendrils escaped, swirling down the back of her neck and along the sides of her face. *Might as well keep going.* She dusted the glass tabletops, and plumped the geometric-patterned cushions that were placed strategically around the lobby, supposedly to encourage people to sit and chat in small groups. But Calcott, located outside of Detroit, was an established suburban area right off the interstate. Typically, the only people who stayed at the Fairview were tired businessmen, who checked in late and checked out early—not prone to lingering over café lattes or glasses of wine in the colorful lobby.

After sufficiently dusting and plumping, Shyanna headed behind the desk. Removing her blazer, she rolled up the sleeves of her white, cotton blouse. She gathered up the full plastic garbage bag from behind the desk and walked through the lobby, emptying the ash trays into it as she went. She wrinkled her nose as some of the ashes flew up and clung to the exposed, damp skin of her forearms. *Great, now I smell like an ash tray.*

Struggling with the heavy bag, she dragged it to the employees-only side door. Suddenly out of the early morning blackness, a white face sprang in front of the window of the door. Shyanna shrieked, dropping the open garbage bag scattering papers and ashes all

over the tile floor in front of the door. She stood frozen, even while a small voice inside was screaming at her to run.

It took several seconds for her to register that the white face hadn't left the window, and that it had a police hat, and blue-uniform covered body attached to it. As her brain slowly began to function again, she noted that it was actually a pretty nice body at that. Broad shoulders, trim waist. Short brown waves peeked from beneath the hat. The face, which no longer seemed so white, broke into a wide grin. The officer pointed at the door, indicating he wanted Shyanna to open it.

Still shaking, she moved to the door, and unlocked it.

"Yes, can I help you officer?"

"I'm really sorry I scared you, miss," he said politely. His voice was deep, resonating a comfortable warmth.

Shyanna shivered a little.

"I'm Officer Davidson, and I was patrolling near the area. Dispatch called to have me check this hotel out. I was told something had happened to the night auditor."

"But I'm the night auditor," Shyanna said in confusion. "I'm fine. I wonder why you would've gotten a call like that."

"Dispatch said they received a call from the Fairview over in Milo. I guess the night auditor there was trying to call you but you never answered."

"That doesn't make sense, I've been here all—oh, wait! I was vacuuming!"

Shyanna laughed. "He must have called while I was vacuuming."

Officer Davidson smiled again.

Nice smile. Love the dimples.

"Well, I'm glad you're all right miss—"

"Shyanna, my name is Shyanna," she extended an ash-covered hand to shake his, then pulled it back quickly before he could touch it. "Oops, sorry." She blushed. "I forgot, I've been cleaning and I was about to take out this trash." They both looked back at the mess that lay all over the floor.

"Well Shyanna, let me help you with that. Since I'm the one who scared you into dropping it, it's only right that I should help you clean it up."

He swung the door open wider and stepped inside. She felt a swirl of cool air and smelled the clean soap scent of his uniform. He was suddenly standing very close to her. She tipped her chin to look him in his eyes. *Mmmm, green. Are guys supposed to have eyelashes that long?*

"Do you have a broom or something?"

"Um...yeah, uh, sure." *Why am I acting like an idiot!* "Let me get it. She walked swiftly back to the utility closet, locating a broom and dustpan. Officer Davidson had already picked up the papers that had flown everywhere. All that was left were the cigarette ashes.

"You sweep, I'll hold the pan." he said easily, squatting down.

"You really don't need to do this." Shyanna was starting to feel self-conscious. She fidgeted, attempting to smooth a few escaped tendrils back into place.

"No trouble at all, sweep away!" *There were those dimples again.*

She swept the ashes into a neat pile and he emptied them into the bag, picking it up with an easy swing of his arm.

“See, we make a great team.”

Shyanna noted, with a distinctly nonfeminist little thrill, how he held the door for her and waited while she preceded him through it. He followed her outside, carrying the bag over to the dumpster and lightly tossed it in.

“Thanks.” She wished she could think of something else to say.

He looked up at the early morning sky, filling his lungs with the cool air. It had a refreshing crispness to it. Even though the official start of spring had been days before, a few hopeful snowflakes floated around, immediately melting as they landed. There was the hint of a rosy glow seeping up between the buildings along the horizon.

He turned, his deep green eyes hitting her full in the face. She shivered again. *Knock it off, Shyanna!* She wrapped her arms around herself.

“Are you cold?” he asked concerned.

“No, I’m fine,” she replied. “I’d better get back inside though.”

“Right.” Was it her imagination, or did he appear a little disappointed. “Look, since I’m here, I think I’ll just check out the parking lot to make sure there aren’t any disreputable characters lurking around or anything. Well, besides me, of course.” He winked. *Okay, he’s cute. He’s definitely cute.*

“That would be great,” she smiled back at him. He walked her to the door, and as she stepped up into the building, she stepped out of her right shoe. He swiftly picked it up, presenting it to her with a mock bow.

“Your footwear, Cinderella.”

“Thank you,” she grinned, taking the shoe from his hand. “I can’t seem to keep these on my feet.”

“Maybe they’re not the right size for you,” he said.

“Maybe not.” She made a point of slowly closing the door before racing like a mad woman to the ladies room.

When she saw her smudged face and disheveled hair in the mirror she groaned. Splashing her face, hands and arms with water, she wiped herself clean with the scratchy brown paper towels. Then pulling her hair out of the scrunchie, she bent over and quickly flipped herself back up, finger fluffing her curls into place.

She rushed back out of the bathroom and once in view of the windows, moved at a distinctly unhurried pace back to the front desk. Staring blindly at the papers that still lay there, she pretended not to notice the flashing red and blue lights moving slowly past the front windows as Officer Davidson cruised around the parking lot. She was pretending to focus so hard, she jumped when she heard the sharp rat-a-tat-tat on the side door.

She hurried to open it. The green eyes lit up.

“You look different.”

“Oh—um, I just cleaned myself up a bit. I had those ashes all over me and everything...” her voice trailed off.

“Well, you look nice.” Their gazes locked. He cleared his throat. “Anyway, I’ve checked out the parking lot and there’s only one thing that concerns me.”

“What’s that?”

“This abandoned car.” He indicated a rusted-out blue Malibu. The windshield had a crack in it, the gas cap was missing and in its place were overlapping pieces of duct tape. The muffler was hanging inches above the ground, and the side mirror was completely broken off. The bumper had clearly met with more than its fair share of other bumpers. “I’m going to run the license plate right now,” he said.

“Um, Officer Davidson--”

“You know, we’ve spent so much time together this morning already, we don’t need to be so formal, you can call me Chris.”

Shyanna looked uncomfortable. “Okay, Chris...that won’t be necessary.”

“What?”

“I mean running the license plate.”

“Why not?”

“Because that’s my car.”

“Oh.”

He looked back at the car and slowly a smile crept over his lips. “Well, now. That car is clearly not safe to drive. In all fairness, I really can’t let you leave in that.”

Shyanna smiled, cocking her head to one side. “Well gee, *Chris*, how do you propose that I get home when my shift ends?”

“What time do you get off?”

“7:00 o’clock.”

“I think the only safe thing would be for me to provide you with a police escort home.”

“Really? Well, if you insist...”

“I do.”

He leaned against the doorway and tipped his hat back on his head, giving her a quizzical look. “Why are you smiling at me like that?”

Shyanna looked down at her shoes, then up into his face. “Oh, I was just wondering what you’re doing for dinner tonight?”